Development

Anthony Burgess as Literary Biographer

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This chapter addresses some questions of literary form and biographical method arising from Anthony Burgess's biographies of Ernest Hemingway and D.H. Lawrence. A new connection is established between Burgess's unsuccessful first attempt to write an autobiography in 1977 and his growing interest in the potential forms of biography, which he explored in novels and non-fiction books in the 1970s and 1980s. A close examination of two specific works, Ernest Hemingway and His World *(1978) and* Flame Into Being *(1985), allows us to chart the evolution of Burgess's biographical method, which he went on to redeploy in his two volumes of formal autobiography,* Little Wilson and Big God *(1987) and* You've Had Your Time *(1990).*

In 1977, as Anthony Burgess approached his sixtieth birthday, he was asked by Robin Skelton, the editor of a Canadian journal, the *Malahat Review*, to write an autobiographical essay. The piece he sent to Skelton was titled "You've Had Your Time: Being the Beginning of an Autobiography." This essay, written in February 1977, should not be confused with the full-length book he published under the same title in 1990, the content of which is entirely different.

Despite its brevity, Burgess's seven-page article, which has never been reprinted elsewhere, is of the greatest possible interest to students of his work. It seems that the larger autobiographical work, of which the *Malahat Review* article was intended to be the opening chapter, was abandoned a short time after the article was sent to the journal. When Burgess returned to the project

of writing his memoirs a decade later, he did not include the 1977 fragment, which might be characterised, following his own practice of deploying musical metaphors, as an overture without an opera.

The alert reader will notice significant factual differences between the family history given in the journal article and the alternative version of the same events which appears in *Little Wilson and Big God*. For example, in 1977, he tells the reader that his mother's family were devout Scottish Jacobites, one of whose members died while fighting in the rebellion under Charles Edward Stuart, known as Bonnie Prince Charlie. None of this Caledonian fantasising survives into the 1987 text of *Little Wilson and Big God*, which simply tells us that his mother's family came from the north of England. How they lost their Scottish roots remains a mystery.

The curious pre-history of Burgess's two autobiographical volumes is not considered in either of the published biographies written by Roger Lewis (2002) and myself. What I want to argue is that Burgess abandoned his autobiography in 1977 because he was not yet ready to write it. He spent the next ten years trying to find the distance and objectivity he would need to examine the events of his own remote past, especially the infancy which saw him traumatised by the deaths of his mother and sister when he was not yet two years old, followed by a period of separation from his father and his eventual reintegration into an unhappy step-family. He also recollects childhood sexual abuse at the hands of a maid with whom he was forced to share a bed while living above the Manchester tobacco shop kept by his father and stepmother. Given the difficulties of addressing this sensitive subject matter, it is remarkable that Burgess was able to overcome his hesitations and return to the autobiographical mode in 1987. The non-fiction books that he wrote in the interim provide some clues as to how he was able to accomplish the task.

Ernest Hemingway and His World emerges from a period of intense creativity in the fields of literature and music. The archive of the International Anthony Burgess Foundation in Manchester contains an uncatalogued typewritten page headed "Work done in 1977," in which Burgess lists the completion of 24 substantial writing projects, including novels (a first draft of *The Pianoplayers* and the novella, *1985*), 100 pages of the book which became *Earthly Powers*, a song cycle (*The Brides of Enderby*), the lyrics and

music for a stage musical comedy titled *Trotsky's In New York*, three long articles for the *New York Times*, monthly reviews for the *Irish Press* and the *Observer*, two film scripts (*Merlin* and *Cyrus the Great*), treatments of two television series about Aristotle Onassis and General Joe Stilwell, a film script about Rome for the Canadian director John McGreevy, reviews for the *New Statesman* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and three articles in Italian for *L'Espresso*. The other item on this list is a "Book about Ernest Hemingway," completed in Monaco on 2 July 1977.

The Hemingway biography was one of 38 illustrated literary lives which appeared in a series commissioned by Thames and Hudson, a commercial publisher who specialised in books about art, architecture, and design. Each of the early volumes was written by a prominent British or Irish writer: other titles in the series included *Rudyard Kipling* by Kingsley Amis, *Virginia Woolf* by her protégé, John Lehmann, and *Somerset Maugham* by Frederic Raphael, better known as a novelist and Oscar-winning screenwriter.

The books in this series were attractively designed by Ian Mackenzie-Kerr, the in-house art editor at Thames and Hudson. The first edition of Burgess's Hemingway volume contains 116 black-and-white photographs, which are missing from recent translations and paperback editions. The absence of these images for the contemporary reader is to be regretted, not least because the photographs and the captions which accompany them, written by Burgess himself, form a crucial part of the meaning of the book. The effect of reading the original version of the book is similar to the experience of watching a documentary about Hemingway: the presence of half-page and full-page photographs means that the text of the biography is occasionally demoted to a secondary role, although the Burgess-voice is still present through the flavoursome picture captions.

The research materials for the Hemingway biography have survived in the book collection of the Burgess Foundation. Through my work as the Foundation's director since 2010, I have had the opportunity to inspect these books while they were in the process of being catalogued, working closely with the archivist, Anna Edwards, and the librarian, Tina Green. As with all of Burgess's non-fiction, he relied heavily on one main source, adding supplementary information as required from other biographies and volumes of letters. The 900-page biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* by Carlos Baker

(1969), provides the factual spine of Burgess's narrative. He also quotes from *Papa Hemingway*, the memoir by A.E. Hotchner, *A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway* by Arthur Waldhorn, and the *Selected Letters 1917–1961*, edited by Carlos Baker. Not including primary texts, there are 27 critical works listed in the bibliography, indicating that Burgess researched his subject with the same level of seriousness that he had brought to his earlier biography of Shakespeare, published in 1970.

Beyond this evidence of wide research, the most striking feature of *Ernest Hemingway and His World* is the presence of Burgess himself as the intrusive biographical narrator who approaches the task with strong opinions about Hemingway's life and work. He affirms the authenticity of *Death in the Afternoon* with reference to the enthusiasm for bullfighting he witnessed in Gibraltar when he was posted there by the British army. Measuring his own experience of the Second World War against Hemingway's self-aggrandising account of liberating Paris, Burgess is inclined to grumble: "It is hard for any British soldier who served out the full five and a half years to work up enthusiasm about the brief and glamorous Hemingway saga" (Burgess, *Ernest Hemingway* 86). He tries to puncture the myth by describing George Orwell "a real fighter" wounded in the Spanish Civil War, quietly working away in London on political journalism and the novel, *Animal Farm,* during the Second World War, "while Hemingway basked and boasted, was a boor and a bore" (86). Elsewhere, we find anecdotes enlivening the text: "[Hemingway] became a very formidable drinker. The manager of the Gritti Palace in Venice tells me that three bottles of Valpolicella first thing in the day were nothing to him, and then there were the daiquiris, Scotch, tequila, bourbon, vermouth-less martinis" (58). Burgess also articulates doubts about the self-mythologising he finds in Hemingway's publications. Commenting on the safari travelogue *Green Hills of Africa*, he writes: "Perhaps the most embarrassing part of the work, as of much of Hemingway's later work, is the endless need to prove virility, not a notable trait of the genuinely virile" (56).

Despite these apparent reservations about Hemingway's self-created myths of hyper-masculinity, Burgess's book is motivated by a strong wish to defend Hemingway against his detractors. Speaking of *A Farewell to Arms*, Burgess writes: "What, at a superficial reading, seems to be a bare scenario with crisp film dialogue turns out to be a highly wrought verbal

artefact in which meaning resides wholly in the rhythms of the language" (55). Arguing that Hemingway is a major force in twentieth-century literature, Burgess declares the best of his writing to be "as considerable as that of Joyce or Faulkner or Scott Fitzgerald" (116). This was high praise indeed from a writer who dedicated much of his adult life to promoting James Joyce and his work, through two published critical books, *Here Comes Everybody* and *Joysprick*, and a stage musical, *Blooms of Dublin*, based on Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Writing about his own 1964 novel, *Nothing Like the Sun*, Burgess said that Shakespeare was such an enigmatic figure in literary history that he demanded "to be probed with the novelist's instruments" (qtd. in Biswell 287). Something of the same kind might be said of his technique in the Hemingway biography, where we find a number of episodes written in a hybrid style which should perhaps be termed creative non-fiction. For example, Burgess gives a memorable account of Hemingway "moving towards dementia" and paranoia towards the end of his life, representing this episode in close third-person narration, which gives the impression of allowing the reader access to Hemingway's disorderly thoughts and anxieties:

> The "Feds" were after him, he said. He had imported that Glasgow girl met in Spain into the United States and was paying for her course in dramatic training: the FBI would interpret that as a cover for gross immorality. Those two men working late at the bank were "Feds," checking his bank account for irregularities. Those in the bar, over there, that looked like travelling salesmen, they were "Feds" too: let's get out of here. (Burgess, *Ernest Hemingway* 110)

This passage, moving towards reported speech at the end, provides a vivid portrait of the artist in decline—but the source of the biographical information is unclear, making it difficult for us to disentangle fact from authorial invention. Declining to show the footprints of his research, Burgess comes close to turning Hemingway into one of his fictional characters—and indeed, he makes a fleeting appearance in the novel *Earthly Powers*, published two years after the Hemingway book appeared. We might reasonably

draw the conclusion that Burgess as literary biographer could not overcome the urge to fictionalise.

One other unconventional aspect of this biography is the humour it directs against its subject. Describing a near-fatal plane crash in Kenya, Burgess paints the scene in broadly comic terms:

> The plane, which seemed moderately airworthy, bumped over an airstrip full of stones and furrows, lifted, dropped, fell, burst into flames. Hemingway butted a jammed door open with his head and damaged shoulder. ... Tradition has it that Hemingway emerged from the accident waving a bunch of bananas and a bottle of gin and shouting: "My luck she is running very good." A popular song with this refrain was recorded by Rosemary Clooney and her husband José Ferrer shortly afterwards. (104)

The novelistic irony which is on display in this extract would become a key element in Burgess's writing when he returned to his autobiography in 1987. For example, when he describes the death of his father, he insists on the comic elements of the story: a drunk priest administers the last rites, and the old man evacuates his bowels at the moment of death (Burgess, *Little Wilson* 192). It is likely that Burgess's biographical engagement with Hemingway provided an opportunity to experiment with a distanced narrating voice, which helped to solve the stylistic problem of how to tell his own life's story.

Reviewing *Ernest Hemingway and His World* in the *Spectator* on 25 November 1978, Richard Shone wrote: "What is curious is that, in spite of the mauling his character gets (and often deserves), Hemingway emerges as an affecting, even invigorating figure—like his heroes, destroyed but not defeated" (23). William Ott in the *Library Journal* was more direct: he claimed that Burgess's biography was "a coffee table book with spunk" (1510). It is interesting to note that female critics were also quite well disposed towards the biography. In a review published in the *Hornbook*, Mary Silva Cosgrave wrote: "In an admirably terse and incisive style, Burgess has assessed Hemingway's literary achievement and reputation during his lifetime and afterward and

has vividly drawn a portrait of the man—as much a creation as his books, and a far inferior creation" (669).

The most perceptive review came from William Sternman, writing in the journal, *Best Sellers*. Describing Burgess's book as "a valuable initiation to one of America's greatest writers," Sternman proposed that Burgess had "not so much interpreted Hemingway's work as recreated it in his own image" (363). This comment was provoked by a passage where Burgess provides a summary of *Fiesta* or *The Sun Also Rises*, translating the novel's action and preoccupations into recognisably Burgessian terms:

> Hemingway's personages pursue an empty alcoholic life in Paris, then, at Pamplona, are involved in the regenerative cleansing ritual of the bullfight. There is something of Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the book, though Hemingway—who read it when it first appeared in 1922—never professed any admiration or even understanding of the poem. Jake is a kind of Fisher King, aware of the aridity of life without love but stricken, cut off from the enactment of desire like any Prufrock. Salvation depends on sacrifice—not that of the Mass (Jake is Catholic, as Hemingway—allegedly converted in Italy—nominally was), but of a ritual in which real blood flows. Enough blood flowed in the war, but the conflict of man and bull elects the confrontation of death and, in a sense, controls death. All this, of course, is grossly to oversimplify. (Burgess, *Ernest Hemingway* 48)

Foregrounding his own preoccupations, Burgess reads Hemingway's novel through the distorting lenses of *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," at the same time as acknowledging that these interpretations would not have been welcomed by the author of *The Sun Also Rises*. In this and other comparable passages, it becomes clear that one of Burgess's intentions as a biographer-critic is to claim Hemingway's writing as part of the modernist canon, even if this means overlooking the surface meaning of the texts and imposing unexpected new critical signatures upon them. Partly because of its stylistic hybridity, *Ernest Hemingway* is a complex and engaging work which deserves a place on the same shelf

as Burgess's *Shakespeare* biography (1970) and *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964), his earlier Shakespearean novel. Nevertheless, the Hemingway-biography remains a relatively obscure part of his canon, which is not as widely discussed as it deserves to be.

In September 1978, fourteen months after he had completed the Hemingway book, Burgess spent two weeks in Chicago, Idaho, Kansas, and Key West with the director Tony Cash and a camera crew, making a film about Hemingway titled *Grace Under Pressure*. This was broadcast on the British television channel ITV on 3 December 1978 as part of the long-running arts series *The South Bank Show*. Copies of the film and the script may be found in the Burgess Foundation's archive. Although Burgess had written a shooting script before he arrived in the United States, there are substantial differences between his script and what was actually shot. In fact, much of the film seems to have been improvised to camera in the locations which had been familiar to Hemingway. *Grace Under Pressure* provides a series of second thoughts about Hemingway, and some of its judgments are bolder than the ones he had advanced in the published biography.

The film begins with a montage of toreadors, big-game hunters, and sea-fishing boats. Burgess gives a commentary in voice-over:

> I have nothing in common at all with Hemingway except the vocation of writer, and Hemingway's way of life is not mine. I don't care much for shooting, fishing, bullfighting, the safari. But I love Hemingway, regard him as immensely important. He of all writers brought the novel out of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Hemingway forged a new way of writing. This is why he's important.

The film commentary clarifies a point which is never directly addressed in the biography: why was Burgess interested in a writer with whom he had so little in common? The answer he provides does much to justify the amount of energy he invested in these book and film projects. Inevitably, perhaps, the claim about Hemingway having "forged a new way of writing" is better evidenced in the biography than in the film, which is rather light on quotations from the work.

Visiting Hemingway's residence in Key West, Burgess walks around the property and offers some speculations about the nature of Hemingway's masculinity as it is revealed in the letters and published works. He throws out a series of rhetorical questions:

> What was the matter with Hemingway? Why the aggression? Was he really aware of sexual incapacity? Was it guilt and, if he was guilty, what was he guilty about? Was it his desertion of [his wife] Hadley? Was it his unwillingness to bring in the social revolution by writing about it? Was he guilty about not being able to write as well as he had done in the creative 1920s? Was he guilty about trying to become one of his own heroes?

At significant moments in the film, Burgess's commentary goes beyond the polite formulations of literary biography. When he considers Hemingway's sex-life, there is further uncertainty: "We must ask the question: did his sexual capacity really match the great shouting virility?" In the final scene, when he visits Hemingway's grave in Ketchum, Idaho, we have the spectacle of one writer confronting the ghost of another, seeking answers but finding the dead man unwilling to disclose his secrets. This closing sequence leaves us with a different representation of Hemingway from what we find in the published book. Burgess improvises a resonant statement about the disjunction between literary writers and their work: "[Hemingway] didn't realize the abiding truth that the artist is always smaller than his art, and he tends to be smaller than ordinary people, if not physically then certainly morally." Once again, it is clear that Burgess is determined to challenge Hemingway's self-created image of a man-of-action with an insatiable sexual appetite. This questioning of popular myths takes a muted form in the biography, but it is foregrounded more strongly in the film.

If we want to gain a fully informed understanding of Burgess on Hemingway, the best approach is to consider the documentary as a supplementary discourse which expands on specific points that are gestured at in the biography. The overall effect of the film is to bring the arguments of the published biographical text more clearly into focus.

Seven years after *Ernest Hemingway and His World* appeared, Burgess produced a much longer tribute to D. H. Lawrence, published in 1985 to mark the hundredth anniversary of his birth. This was *Flame into Being: The Life and Work of D. H. Lawrence*, commissioned by William Heinemann, the firm responsible for publishing Lawrence's collected works and most of Burgess's novels until 1968. In the opening chapter, Burgess makes an explicit comparison between Hemingway and Lawrence, raising the possibility that the American writer was still in his thoughts as he warmed up to examining Lawrence:

> It may be that Hemingway's prose is the biggest stylistic innovation of our century. ... Next to him Lawrence looks very old-fashioned, but he was rejecting the rational civilisation which foundered in the Great War while Hemingway was still a schoolboy. In a sense his cult of Natural Man is complementary to Hemingway's: Hemingway's heroes are solitary men, often with guns; Lawrence's fight with women in the intervals of loving them. (Burgess, *Flame into Being* 8)

The main sources for *Flame into Being* were the primary texts of the novels and Aldous Huxley's edition of *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, published by Heinemann in 1932. The biography of Lawrence by Richard Aldington seems to have entered the Burgess household shortly after it appeared in 1950, and this book has been annotated by his first wife, Llewela. The book collection of the Burgess Foundation includes Lawrence's poems, essays, and non-fiction works. My survey of this library has yielded the following information: there are 47 books by Lawrence in the collection, and nine critical and biographical books about him. Burgess owned five different editions of *Sons and Lovers*; he also wrote introductions to three of Lawrence's travel books and an Italian translation of *Women in Love*. The earliest edition of Lawrence owned by Burgess, a hardback reprint of *The Rainbow*, was published in 1930, the year in which Lawrence died. The only significant gap in Burgess's collection seems to be the plays, about which he has nothing to say in *Flame into Being*, possibly because he had never read them or seen them performed. Many of the Lawrence-books are annotated by Burgess

himself, which is quite unusual: among more than 7000 surviving volumes in the collection, fewer than one per cent are annotated, but the Lawrence editions are more heavily marked than any other area of the collection, including the numerous books on Shakespeare and James Joyce.

Lawrence is one of the key modernist writers discussed by Burgess in *They Wrote in English*, a two-volume literary history and anthology, published in Milan by Tramontana in 1979. Lawrence appears both in the narrative history (volume 1) and in the anthology (volume 2), where he is represented by two long poems, "Song of a Man Who Has Come Through" and "Bavarian Gentians." Burgess's enthusiasm for Lawrence as a poet and travel writer emerges very clearly from the summary of his career provided in *They Wrote in English*. In 1979, he characterised Lawrence not as a thinker or a philosopher, but as the prophet of primitivism who looked back to the "dark gods" worshipped by the Aztecs and the Etruscans. Comparing him with Joyce and T. S. Eliot, Burgess proposes that Lawrence "lacks the shaping, polishing instinct" associated with these other writers, but he argues that the excitement of reading him comes from his spontaneous style: "it is as though we were in the poet's workshop, watching the poem being made" (Burgess, *They Wrote in English* 74; vol. 1). He claims that the best of his writing is to be found in the poems and the Italian travel books, especially *Sea and Sardinia*.

By the time he wrote *Flame into Being*, having re-read most of Lawrence's works in preparation for the task, Burgess had changed his mind about which parts of the canon were the most significant and enduring. While generally valuing all of Lawrence's longer novels, he makes a strong case for the two novels composed during the First World War as being at the heart of Lawrence's vision: *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* emerge from Burgess's reassessment as works that should be ranked among "the ten great novels of the century" (*Flame into Being* 99). Despite the appearance of formlessness, these novels reveal themselves, on careful re-reading, to possess a quality of "relentless motion" towards a conclusion "with no sense of contrivance" (100). Lawrence's letters are also said to be a vital part of the *oeuvre*: they are, in Burgess's view, no less full of "fire and conviction" than the poems, and often they are indistinguishable from his utterances in free verse (202). In fact, there is a sense in which Burgess sets out to remake Lawrence in his own image, as a prolific author who never

suffered from writer's block, and who roamed freely across the boundaries of genre. "Lawrence's entire output," he writes, "adds up to a unity to be read rather as one reads the Bible" (11). The argument that it is necessary to consider the *oeuvre* rather than any individual work has also been made by critics of Burgess's writing, most recently by Jim Clarke in his critical study, *The Aesthetics of Anthony Burgess* (2017).

Other affinities between the two writers are outlined by Burgess in a chapter titled "Myself and Lawrence When Young" (*Flame into Being* 1–11). Like Lawrence, Burgess grew up in a working-class district in the north of England, in a household where dialect was spoken and effete Londoners were regarded with suspicion. Both belonged to the first generation of their families to achieve a university education, then to discover that the opportunities available in their local areas were insufficient to fulfil their ambitions. Although Burgess was initially drawn to Joyce's *Ulysses* as a teenage reader, he also read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Lawrence's response to Freud), along with novels by Aldous Huxley and Radclyffe Hall. As a young man, Burgess was inclined to think that Lawrence was a great writer because he was subversive and had been banned. In his mature years, he valued him as a stylist who wrote out of a compulsion to express himself: "Lawrence is impatient with the techniques of literature; to read him is to feel oneself in contact with a personality which has broken through form and rhetoric and confronts one in a kind of nakedness" (9). The figure of the author which emerges from his writing is, in Burgess's view, unformed, irrational, and composed of shifting personalities: he always seems to be in a state of becoming rather than being. Composing this semi-autobiographical chapter gave Burgess the opportunity to examine his early life by comparing his own family circumstances with those of Lawrence. The account he gives of his adolescent reading (Joyce, Lawrence, Huxley) is replayed with only minor variations in *Little Wilson and Big God*. Lawrence emerges from both *Flame into Being* and *Little Wilson and Big God* as a crucial formative influence, first encountered in 1930 when Burgess was just 13 years old. Reading the two books in tandem, it is possible to see that the opening section of *Flame into Being* provides a condensed version of material that Burgess expanded in the first volume of his memoirs, the manuscript of which was completed the following year.

Burgess was unusual among critics in the 1980s for insisting on the centrality of Lawrence's poems. *Flame into Being* offers sympathetic readings of two poetry collections, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and *Nettles*. There is a useful commentary on one of Lawrence's last poems, "Bavarian Gentians," written in 1929 when he knew that he was dying, in which the flowers of the title represent "torches which would lead him to the underworld" (191). The poem appealed to Burgess's sensibility as a musician; and he pursued his argument about the modernity of Lawrence beyond the constraints of formal biography when he wrote musical settings of four poems by Lawrence, performed in Nottingham in 1985 and later broadcast on BBC radio. These are the same poems which appear in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, the anthology edited by Michael Roberts, two copies of which appear in the catalogue of Burgess's private library. From a musical point of view, his Lawrence songs share certain qualities with *Winter Words*, Benjamin Britten's melancholy song cycle for tenor and piano, based on the poems of Thomas Hardy and first performed in 1953. Scoring these songs for a male voice in the higher range, Burgess deploys a small ensemble of flute, oboe, cello, and piano to achieve similar effects: he borrows the principle of fragmented melodies from Britten's song cycle, translating Lawrence's poems into a recognisably modernist musical idiom. Through the composition of a Lawrentian song-cycle, Burgess admitted Lawrence into the small group of modernist writers (the other members were Joyce, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot) whose poems he set to music. There is further research to be done into music as a form of creative expression through which Burgess reworked and remade poems by others.

Reviewing *Flame into Being* in the *London Review of Books* on 19 September 1985, Frank Kermode wrote: "What gives this small but quite ambitious book its quality is simply the freedom of comment and the independence of opinion that a good craftsman may enjoy as he contemplates, without envy, a great one." Although Kermode disputed some of the unorthodox judgments on individual novels, the overall impression was a favourable one: "Burgess's book never ceases to remind one that Lawrence was a great writer, and that argument about him should always begin from a shared assumption of that greatness." If there were not many other reviews, this was largely because Burgess's book was one of numerous centennial volumes published

in 1985. *Flame into Being* was also partly overshadowed by the simultaneous appearance of the Cambridge edition of Lawrence's works, which included previously unpublished novels and drafts.

Lawrence famously described himself as "infinitely an outsider. And of my own choice," and the same might be said of Burgess's series of voluntary expatriations to Malaya, Malta, Italy, and Monaco, and his ambivalent outsider's attitude towards his own Englishness (qtd. in Worthen vii). Looking in detail at Burgess's critical statements about Lawrence, we can see that his influence on Burgess's apprehension of the forms of writing has been underestimated. It is clear that Burgess had been reading Lawrence and thinking about him for a period of more than 50 years before he wrote *Flame into Being*. His influence was an enabling one: he offered an encouraging model of how to be an expatriate English writer and a literary craftsman who was driven by the need to discover new techniques and modes of expression with each book.

After completing *Flame into Being*, Burgess revisited his family history at greater length in *The Pianoplayers* (drafted in 1977 but not completed until 1985), a novel which celebrates the music halls and silent cinemas where his parents had made their living before and after the First World War. The book draws extensively on the unreliable legends about Burgess's family as music-hall performers in Manchester and Glasgow, although no evidence has emerged to confirm that they were employed on a regular basis as musicians. Burgess's claim that his mother, Elizabeth Burgess Wilson, had performed on stage at the Gentlemen's Concert Hall in Manchester is undermined by the factual record, which indicates that the building was demolished in 1897, when Elizabeth was nine years old (Biswell 10). On his marriage certificate in 1908, his father, Joseph Wilson, gave his profession not as a musician but as a "publisher's clerk." Nevertheless, the novel aims to reflect the oral legends about his parents passed down to Burgess by his extended family, and at no point does it advance any claim to be rooted in verifiable fact. Much of the narrative is characterised by the humour and irony that we also find in the Hemingway biography.

The next book he wrote after *The Pianoplayers* was *Little Wilson and Big God*, which provides an expanded account of his Manchester childhood and upbringing. This book takes us through the Second World War and the years

he spent in colonial Malaya. It ends with Burgess's decision to become a professional writer in 1959, provoked by an apparent medical misdiagnosis in Brunei. He returned to the autobiographical project that he had abandoned in 1977 with newly-discovered confidence in his ability as a non-fiction writer. Working on biographies of Hemingway and Lawrence had taught him how to establish a certain distance from his subject-matter, and the ironic narrative voice he had used in these books is also a prominent feature of his memoirs. This helps us to understand why there is so little analysis of his emotional condition in *Little Wilson and Big God* or its successor volume, *You've Had Your Time*.

In an unpublished letter to A. S. Byatt, dated 14 February 1986 and sent while he was working on *Little Wilson and Big God*, Burgess writes: "the young man I'm presenting in the autobiography is not someone I really know. I certainly don't like him much" (uncatalogued correspondence, Burgess Foundation archive). There is a strong implication that he had achieved the objectivity he needed to examine his early life as if it were someone else's. I would argue that Burgess arrived at this position as a result of undertaking his biographical work on Hemingway and Lawrence. He had discovered an approach to narrating other writers' lives which could be redeployed when he came to composing his autobiographical volumes.

It seems reasonable to conclude that further research into Burgess as a biographer would be worth pursuing, and the focus might be widened to accommodate his fictionalised lives of Shakespeare, Napoleon Bonaparte, John Keats, and Christopher Marlowe. There is no doubt that his lives of Hemingway and Lawrence are complex literary artefacts, carefully researched and written with the insight of a professional writer considering the work of others. As critics were not slow to recognise, readers of *Ernest Hemingway* and *Flame into Being* are invited to share Burgess's deep imaginative sympathy with the literary lives he narrates. But these two non-fiction books are also important because they laid the foundation for the two volumes of "confessions" that followed, *Little Wilson and Big God* and *You've Had Your Time*, which are widely considered to be among the most rewarding books in the Burgess canon.

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